

Helsinki Summit's Positive Fallouts on Syria

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In the debris of the Trump-Putin summit at Helsinki on July 16, the understanding reached on the Syrian conflict stands out as a positive outcome. The steady improvement in the politico-military situation in Syria and the easing of rivalries involving the external parties bears this out. Interestingly, [a Xinhua report](#) with Damascus dateline on Sunday highlights this happy outcome of the Helsinki summit, citing Syrian experts.

The big picture is that there seems to be an understanding between Washington and Moscow that in the interests of the stabilization of Syria, the Assad administration regains control of the entire country.

Secondly, having realized that the regime-change agenda in Syria has floundered, the US and other Western powers see the need to secure their interests through negotiating with Russia. The Russians not only spearheaded virtually all the initiatives so far to strike deals with the rebel groups (and thereby avoiding use of military force as far as possible to 'liberate' territories from rebel occupation) but also acted as 'bridge' between the Syrian government and rebel groups. Indeed, the Russian credibility as reliable negotiators and guarantors has soared.

Thirdly, what emerges in the downstream of the Helsinki summit is that the US desires to withdraw forces from Syria while maintaining its interests in the Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Syria.

The above broad trends find reflection in the developments through the past 3-week period both in southern and northern Syria. Thus, the situation on Syria's southern border with Israel, which had assumed dangerous proportions, has calmed down on the lines that Russian President Vladimir Putin had outlined at the press conference with President Trump in Helsinki on July 16.

That is to say, the terrorist groups controlling the border region with Golan Heights have been vanquished, [Syrian forces have gained control of Quneitra province](#) (including the border crossing with Golan Heights) and, most importantly, on August 2, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force returned to its positions on the line of separation between Syria and the Israeli-occupied territories in the Golan Heights (which it had to leave in 2014 following Israeli pressure tactic to create conditions for Israel's covert nexus with the terrorist groups.)

Besides, [Russian Military Police has also been deployed to Quneitra as guarantors](#). All in all, suffice to say, the most dangerous front in the conflict has calmed down appreciably in a matter of a fortnight since the Helsinki summit.

Similarly, in northeastern Syria, which is dominated by the Kurdish militia (supported by the US), there are new stirrings. Presumably with the knowledge and concurrence of their US mentors, Kurdish groups have begun talks with Damascus to negotiate the future of their traditional homelands in northeastern regions. The [Kurdish groups have claimed that an agreement has been reached](#) with Damascus “to draw a roadmap that would lead to a democratic, decentralized Syria.”

The Kurdish groups will explore the possibility of gaining some measure of local autonomy in the areas they control (a quarter of Syrian territory), whereas, Damascus will prioritize regaining the territories. Clearly, further negotiations are expected and the advantage lies with Syrian government.



Looking ahead, these substantial achievements and the fact that Syrian government has become more stable and is in greater control will give impetus to the efforts at finding a political solution to the conflict. Therefore, the fate of the terrorist groups ensconced in northern Latakia and Idlib in northwestern Syria bordering Turkey is fast becoming a residual issue.

[Russia has given more time to Turkey](#) to rein in these groups. The idea is to work out a deal for the terrorist groups to surrender, as has happened in southern Syria, so that fighting and bloodshed can be avoided. A deal may be in the works by the time the [planned summit meeting of Turkey, Russia, France and Germany](#) is held in Istanbul on September 7.

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